DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 217 320 CG 015 926

AUTHOR Motet, Dan
TITLE Adjustment Therapy with Japanese.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (61st, Los Angeles, CA, April 9-12, 1981). For related document, see CG 015 925.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling Techniques; Counseling Theories; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Pluralism; Emotional Development; *Identification (Psychology); Interpersonal Competence; Japanese American Culture; *Japanese Americans; Models; Perspective Taking; *Psychotherapy
IDENTIFIERS *Allo Centered Psychotherapy; *Significant Other

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that the automatic use of therapeutic approaches devised for Americans and Europeans with clients belonging to different cultures may be counter-productive. Cultural differences between Caucasian-Americans and Japanese-Americans are examined and general elements to be considered in counseling Japanese-Americans are explained. Methods of dealing with potential reentry problems, family environment, age and sex of client, nonverbal and verbal communication differences, and certain American customs that may be offensive to the Japanese are discussed. Suggestions for therapists to help bridge cultural differences and establish rapport with Japanese clients during the initial interviews are provided. The Allo-Centered Psychotherapy approach is presented as a model of therapy suitable for Japanese clients. (Author/NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED217320

ADJUSTMENT THERAPY WITH JAPANESE

Dan Motet
Seattle Pacific University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dan Motet

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 015926

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Los Angeles, CA, April 9-12, 1981.

ADJUSTMENT THERAPY WITH JAPANESE

Dan Motet
Seattle Pacific University

Most therapeutic systems were devised to be used within the American and European society, including what we tend to call very loosely, the Western World. Unfortunately, the automatic use of these systems with a client belonging to a different culture can be counter-productive. Because of many similarities between modern Japan and the United States, it is tempting to treat Japanese as we would Caucasian-Americans. In reality, there are many persistent differences that can be traced to some degree even in Japanese Americans as far as the second and third generations. Such differences may be found along the dimensions of dependency versus self-reliance, cooperativeness versus individualism, respect for hierarchy and authority versus egualitarianism and challenge of authority, elder orientation versus youth orientation, submissive role of women versus assertive and activist role of women, indirect communication versus direct communication, etc. These differences are expressed consciously or unconsciously, more or less overt and in varying degrees, depending on individual and extent of westernization. When we do therapy with Japanese, we should not stereotype them; still, we cannot ignore the influences of the culture especially when we deal with group-oriented societies.

Let us look first to some general elements that we have to take into consideration:

Is the client a permanent resident of the U.S. or an alien eventually returning to Japan? Are we not going to create re-entry problems if they are too successful in adjusting to a society so different from their own? How can we accomplish both a good adjustment, and later avoid difficulties when returning home? The answer lies in pursuing a cultural enrichment rather than a cultural change, helping the client to learn to function in both cultures and maintain a sense of continuity and growth rather than feeling transplanted and then re-transplanted when she returns to Japan.

The psychologist helps the client to adjust to the pluralistic American society while helping her to maintain a respect for the Japanese culture and learn to value and understand it in a broader context.

If the client is a resident of the U.S., an important factor to consider is whether he is living with older members of the family, like parents and/or grandparents. If he is, then we have to consider that by

working as we would do with an American to help the client achieve autonomy, we may create great emotional and financial distress to the other members of the family and may induce guilt in the client while depriving him of the group support which he needs, whether he is aware of it or not.

The age and sex are very important factors to consider when working with a Japanese. For instance, if the client is a male, the more traditional he is, the more helpful it will be for the counselor to also be a male and at least as old as the client. If the client is a female, the sex is not as important; still, the more traditional she is, the better it is to have an older therapist, especially if the therapist is also a female.

Whether the client is a man or a woman would make a greater difference when working with Japanese than when working with Americans. It is true that recent trends away from the traditional Japanese education, as well as the influence of feminism, produced some changes, but they had, in general, little influence on the deeper psychological structure in spite of the appearances.

There are some nonverbal cues that we are prone to misinterpret. For instance, a Japanese woman who giggles, covers her mouth with the hand and bends over in a sort of slightly sideway bow, is not engaging in "silly behavior," but is embarrassed. Similarly, when she narrows her eyes, she is not trying to be seductive, but is showing interest in what is going on.

Certain American customs may be offensive to a Japanese. Putting the feet on the table would head the list, but even crossing the legs may be considered "unsightly and lacking both class and respect." In the everyday interactions, it can be easily overlooked but in the emotionally loaded situation that occurs in counseling, it may have subtle influences in the dynamics. The Japanese may feel that the therapist is not sincere, not genuine.

Looking straight into the eyes, a behavior that is taught to the American therapist as conferring interest, openness and honesty, may be interpreted by the Japanese as arrogance and aggressiveness.

Establishing a good rapport before everything else is generally important, but it is essential when working with persons from a culture more group-oriented than ours, as is in the case of the Japanese.

On the other hand, the process of establishing this rapport has to be slower than what we are used to. It is difficult for Japanese, particularly for women, to interact with people they do not know. However, once the rapport develops, it can get much deeper than it usually does with Americans.

Active listening, which is a technique used by many to build rapport and to help the client become aware of deep feelings, presents problems

in our case, especially in the incipient phases of the therapy. The Japanese, the men in particular, tend to express feelings only in the presence of intimate friends or on special occasions designed for catharsis. They tend to describe the problem rather in terms of physical complaints; that is why we frequently get them as referrals from a physician. Also, the Japanese being status and hierarchy conscious, expects the therapist to be more directive to "tell them what to do." Especially when the client is a woman and the therapist is a non-directive Rogerian male, she may feel very embarrassed, even threatened by silence from the part of the man who is supposed to lead. In addition, Japanese use a sophisticated two-level communication: the surface meaning and the connotation. They feel uncomfortable with the American emphasis on direct communication, especially when feelings are elicited. Frequently the poor command of English increases even more the problem of expressing feelings. Nevertheless, contrary to what is believed, the Japanese, when in the acceptable environment, are more emotional and expressive than the Americans. The therapist has to develop the patience and the know-how of creating such an environment by developing a good rapport.

Another problem in communication results from the fact that Japanese tend not to easily commit themselves verbally. Their language allows subtle, open-ended understatements facilitated by the fact that sentences can be formed without using the subject or verb. This may make their "translated English" seem poorer than it actually is. When pressed for clarification, either through reflection or confrontation, they may accept whatever the therapist may say, as "not to make him/her lose face." The way things are said is more important for them than the word or even the deed itself; therefore, the counselor's insistence on the precise labeling of the feelings may be incomprehensible and even seem rude to them.

In summary, during the initial interviews, the therapist is advised to give special attention to the bridging of cultural differences. The more traditional the client is, the more the therapist will have to: (a) be more reserved, conventional, and respectful, especially towards older clients; (b) accept the role of authority and be rather directive, but not confronting; (c) avoid insisting on the expression of feelings and be content for a while with the discussion of behaviors and even physical symptoms without rushing into psychological interpretation; (d) avoid bringing the client (especially the male) into the situation of having to admit failure, thereby causing him to lose face; (e) accept the client's style of indirect speech with unfinished sentences while tuning in to his/her nonverbal cues; (f) be aware of culturally different nonverbal cues, etc.

As the relationship develops and the client becomes more open, confident, and trusting, many of the above recommendations may be gradually relaxed.

We should not be too concerned if we see the client developing a greater dependency than we would expect when working with an American. It is the expression of what the Japanese researcher Takeo Doi labeled "Amae," which could be roughly translated as a sweet childlike dependency. This is different from what we would call overdependency. It is natural to Japanese and

it should not worry us because it does not hinder assertiveness. In fact, when well handled by a therapist comfortable with it, Amae can facilitate the therapeutic interaction.

One important characteristic of Japanese, especially women, is to write diaries and at times share part of them with another person. It is one of the indirect and still intimate means of sharing: first communication to herself, then sharing the intimate thoughts with a significant other whom she can trust.

When the rapport is well established, the counselor may try a "diaries exchange" technique in which the therapist answers to the client's shared diary with personal reactions to the content. Again, like in the face to face interaction, it is helpful that in the beginning the counselor's reactions be tuned down. Later, as the client's diary starts indicating less and less resistance and more openness, the therapist can also reflect to a deeper and deeper level. This exchange may in the beginning run parallel with the verbal interaction in the session, and only later, when the client becomes more at ease and even volunteers bringing together the two ways of communication, the therapist will verbally comment on the diary material. This may sound a little schizophrenic to a Western mind, but it fulfills two important needs of the oriental: to share intimate feelings and to protect the fragile inner sensitivity. It may be easier for us to understand if we think of the need to belong and share and to be heard versus the need for privacy and independence. It is beyond the purpose of this paper, but a balance of contraries is characteristic of the Japanese and plays an important role in the dynamics of the society. The misunderstanding of this balance developed the myth of the impenetrability and unpredictability of the Oriental, but we have also the same balance of contraries everywhere, even in the checks and balance system of the American Government or in the organizations of the institutions.

It is very helpful for the therapist to know how our society looks to a Japanese in order to better understand the adjustment that the client has to make. To a Japanese, the Americans seem engaged in a rapid-paced life, always doing something without any time to relate with each other or to contemplate. Our individualism may be perceived by the Japanese as selfishness and lack of concern for others. On the other hand, the individual freedom related to it may be both admired and considered excessive, breeding lawlessness and lack of responsibility.

Regarding the way we express emotions and interact with each other, we appear to them about the way South Americans appear to us: talkative, with a flourished and loud speech. Our informality in behavior, especially our attitude towards leaders and elders, appear to them as inconsiderate, even rude. Like to many foreigners, the Americans' unusually outgoing way of relating to strangers right from the first encounter, together with the inflationary use of the word "friend," create high expectations to Japanese newcomers. Deprived of the group support, landing in a different, nearly mythical country, they are highly impressed with this reception only to feel rejected later when the depth of relationship fails to increase.

These are only some of the elements that create difficulties in the adjustment of a Japanese to our society and should be discussed and explained in order to avoid either a resentment or sense of inadequacy.

On the dimension of individualism-group orientation, the American Anglo-Saxon culture places itself on the extreme end of "individualism," while the Japanese culture positions itself towards the "group orientation" extreme. Therefore, the Allo-Centered Psychotherapy, a new approach that I presented in a previous paper, is very useful in adjustment therapy with Japanese. The Allo-Centered approach takes a middle-of-the-road position by encouraging the individual to be oriented towards other individuals instead of the group or self, and thereby creates a good meeting ground for different cultures in our pluralistic society.

For the Japanese client, this approach has the advantage in that it indirectly explores the client's feelings and relationships, which is for them a culturally more acceptable way. It also uses the already existing group orientation of the client, but it individualizes it in a more Anglo-Saxon way. The other-orientation, which is quite understandable to our client, is not only more adjustive to our society than the traditional Japanese group-immersion, but it also brings positive reactions from the others.

Acknowledgement: Thanks are due to Miss Atsuko Hirota--Japan, for substantial contribution to research and to Miss Mieko Okamura--Seattle, for valuable advice and editorial work.

Bibliography

De Mente, B. Japanese Manners & Ethics in Business. Phoenix/Tokyo: Simpson-Doyle & Co., 1975.

Doi, T. The Anatomy of Dependence. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1973.

Fieg, J. P. and Blair, J. G. There is a Difference. Washington: Meridian House International, 1980.

Harris, P. R. and Moran, R. T. Managing Cultural Differences. Huston: Gulf Publ., 1979.

Lebra, J. et al (Eds). Women in Changing Japan. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976.

Lebra, T. S. and Lebra, W. P. (Eds) Japanese Culture and Behavior. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1974.

Lebra, S. T. Japanese Patterns of Behavior. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976.

Marsella, A. J. and Pedersen, P. (Eds) Cross-Cultural Counseling and Psychotherapy. New York: Pergamon Press, 1981.

Minami, H. Psychology of the Japanese People. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Pedersen, P. Asian Personality Theories. In Corsini, R. (Ed.), Current Personality Theories. Itasca, New York: Peacock, 1977.

Pedersen, P. et al. Counseling Across Cultures. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976.